United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81212

Environmental Assessment

New Grazing Authorizations for North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2012-0031 EA

February, 2012

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: Grazing Authorization #0504567 (North Hondo) and No current authorization (South Hondo)

PROJECT TITLE: Permit Issuance for North Hondo (#03705) and South Hondo (#03821) allotments (currently unallotted BLM).

PLANNING UNIT: Huerfano #8

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

ALLOTMENT	COUNTY	LEGAL	PUBLIC ACRES
North Hondo	Huerfano	T26S, R68W, S. 7	763
		T26S, R69W, S. 1, 12, 13, 14	
South Hondo	Huerfano	T26S, R69W, S. 14, 15, 22	404

1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. BACKGROUND: This EA has been prepared by the BLM to analyze authorization to graze livestock on the North Hondo and South Hondo allotments. Both allotments were previously made up the Red Canyon Allotment (#05732) The Red Canyon Allotment has not been grazed since 1985 and no previous NEPA analysis of grazing impacts has been done for the allotment. The previous and current allotments are categorized as Custodial. Previous range surveys on allotments in this area have been shown to have under-estimated the amount of forage production on public land on the allotments. This has led to inaccurate billing by BLM in the past and cases where the grazing lessees have not been billed for the full amount of forage that they were allowed to utilize.

Grazing use on Red Canyon Allotment was scheduled as follows:

			Grazing Period		% Public	
Allotment	Number	Kind	Begin	End	Land	AUMs
Red Canyon	7	Cattle	03/01 – 02/28		100%	16

The previous permits for the Red Canyon Allotment did not include terms and conditions.

The total amount of authorized livestock grazing on the Red Canyon Allotments was:

	Authorized Livestock Grazing		
Allotment	Total	Suspended	Active
Red Canyon # 05732	91	75	16

As part of the permit renewal process, range surveys have been conducted on the allotments in order to verify previous estimations of forage production on public land. Prior to this effort, estimates of forage production on the allotments were based on rangeland surveys conducted in the late 1970's. However, improved technology such as Global Positioning System (GPS) mapping and, most importantly, the recent development of soil maps by the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have allowed surveys which are more accurate than previous surveys of the area. Recent rangeland inventories have indicated the previous method of inventory often under-estimated the actual amount of forage production on the public land. This has led to inaccurate billing by BLM in the past. Under Custodial Management the permittee is authorized to harvest 40% - 60% of the annual forage. In cases where BLM under-estimated how much forage was actually present on the allotment, the permittee was frequently under-billed.

The proposed action includes a correction in forage production estimates on public land based on the recent, updated surveys. This adjustment in the forage production will be reflected by an adjustment in BLM's estimation of the carrying capacity of the allotments and the number of AUMs authorized under the new grazing permit. However, it is important to note that the updated amount of AUMs will not change the actual amount of grazing use occurring "on the ground". Under the new grazing permit, the permittee will continue to be limited to using 40% - 60% of the annual forage. The only difference will be that the permittee's grazing bill will be adjusted to more accurately reflect how much grazing use actually results in 40% - 60% utilization.

Interdisciplinary land health evaluations were not conducted for the Red Canyon Allotment. Land health assessments are scheduled to be completed for the North Hondo and South Hondo allotments during 2012. Members of the Natural Resources staff in the Range and Wildlife programs have determined that the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments are meeting Rangeland Health Standards for Colorado.

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to complete a site-specific evaluation of grazing that provides information to be analyzed by the BLM in conformance with the implementing regulations for the NEPA (40 CFR Part 1500), FLPMA, and Public Law 106-113 section 325 to determine whether changes are necessary to current management of the allotment to be in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act. The purpose of the action is also to ensure that all authorizations implement provisions of, and is in conformance with, the Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan (5-13-1996), and in conformance with the Secretary Approved Rangeland Health Standards for Colorado. The action is needed to respond to the expiring permit and new grazing use on BLM land.

1. This analysis is needed to consider the impacts of livestock grazing use on public lands within the respective allotments to determine if they are meeting the Standards for Public Land Health and are within the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing in Colorado.

2. Secondly, the proposed action is needed to ensure that grazing use continues to help the allotments meet Standards for Public Land Health and future grazing use on the allotment is consistent with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado.

1.4 DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM will decide whether to approve the proposed Grazing Permit based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA will analyze impacts associated with authorizing ten year grazing permits. The BLM may choose to: a) accept the project as proposed, b) accept the project with modifications/mitigation, c) accept an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not authorize the project at this time. The finding associated with this EA may not constitute the final approval for the proposed action.

1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/96

Decision Number/Page: 8-2, 8-4, 8-6, C-30, C-31, C-35, C-36, C-38, C-41, C-44

Decision Language:

8-2: Season of use and stocking rates will continue based on the Grazing EIS and vegetation monitoring.
8-4: Grazing is authorized on 61 allotments
8-6: 54 allotments are categorized as Custodial
C-30: Base livestock grazing management on the 1981 Royal Gorge Area Grazing EIS.
C-31: Authorize adjustments in the actual AUMs when warranted by weather and other conditions.
C-35: Conduct EIS on allotments with conflicts, and adjust stocking rates and season of use accordingly.
C-36: Grazing systems will be implemented by an IAP. Plans will be prepared in consultation, cooperation, and coordination with the permittee and other affected parties to meet multiple use objectives.
C-38: Continue to construct range improvement projects on an as needed basis. Complete NEPA documentation on each project as needed.
C-41: Adjustments in grazing use will be made by allotment on a case by case basis. Changes in number of livestock, season of use, duration of use, and class of livestock can be made based on monitoring studies and inventory data.
C-44: On single pasture allotments with season long spring-summer grazing, utilization will be held to the 40 – 60% range on forage species in lieu of a rest standard. This requirement will be on high elevation allotments where deferment or dormant season use is impracticable because of deep snow and fencing the allotment into smaller units is uneconomical.

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

1.6 SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES

1.5.1 Scoping: NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

Persons/Public/Agencies Consulted: Scoping, by posting this project on the Royal Gorge Field Office website, was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. In addition to the website, agencies from the Colorado State Land Board and Colorado Parks and Wildlife were consulted. No comments or issues were received.

Issues Identified: No issues were identified during the scoping process.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

2.2.1 Proposed Action

The proposed action is to issue grazing authorizations on the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments for the next 10 years under custodial management. New "Terms and Conditions" addressing forage utilization, cultural and paleontological resources will be included in the new authorizations (see below).

Range conditions or livestock distribution may warrant new range improvements. These improvements include but are not limited to: water developments, fences, livestock trails, livestock handling facilities and cattleguards. Proposals for new range improvement projects are subject to review under NEPA. This review will determine the appropriate level of NEPA analysis to be conducted.

The Proposed Action:

1. Would issue new grazing authorizations for the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments for ten years.

Grazing use on the allotments would be scheduled as follows:

Allotment	Number	Kind	Grazing Period Begin	Grazing Period End	% Public Land	AUMs
North Hondo	6	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100%	78
South Hondo	1	Cattle	03/01	02/28	100%	13

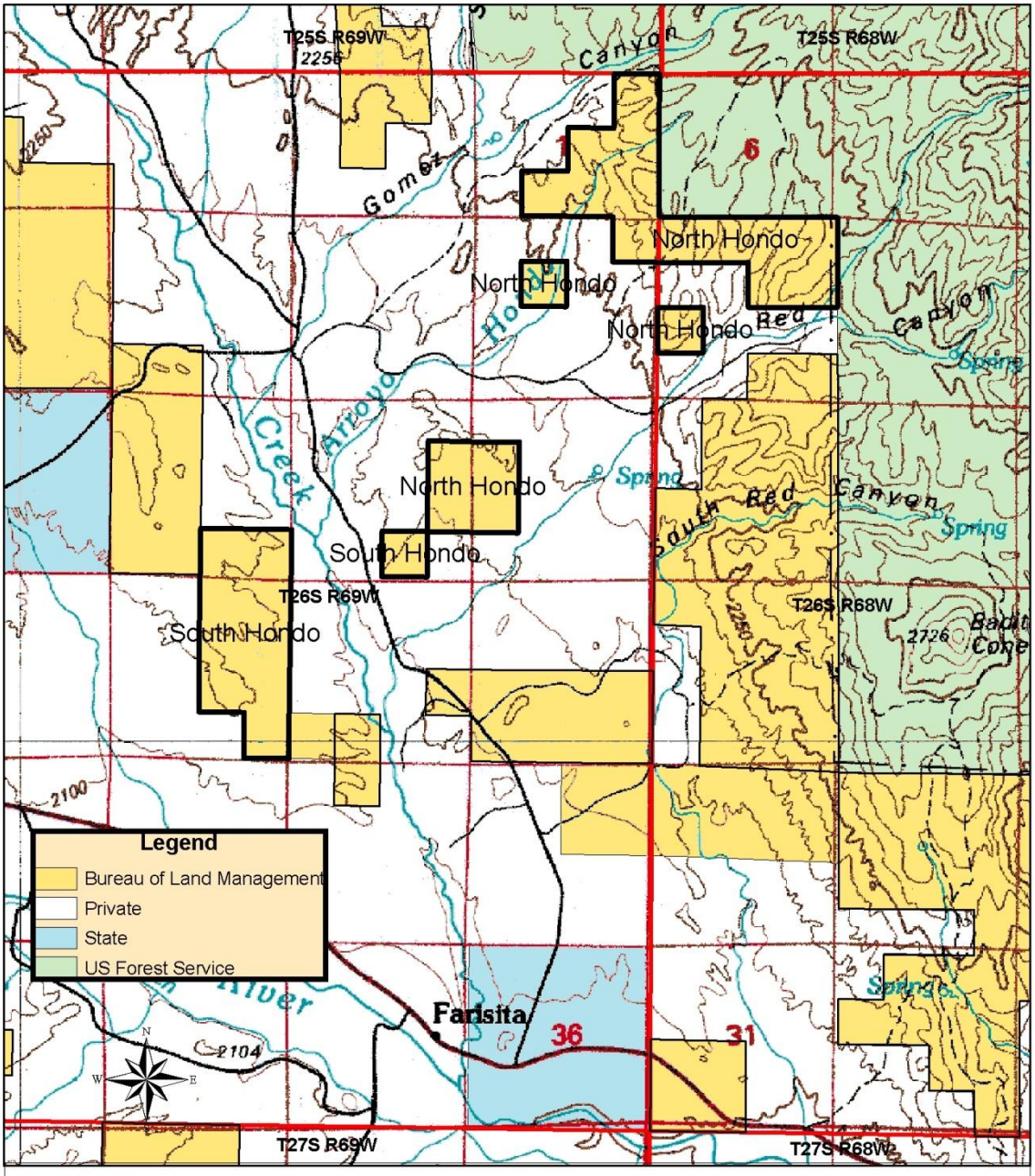
The total amount of authorized livestock grazing would be:

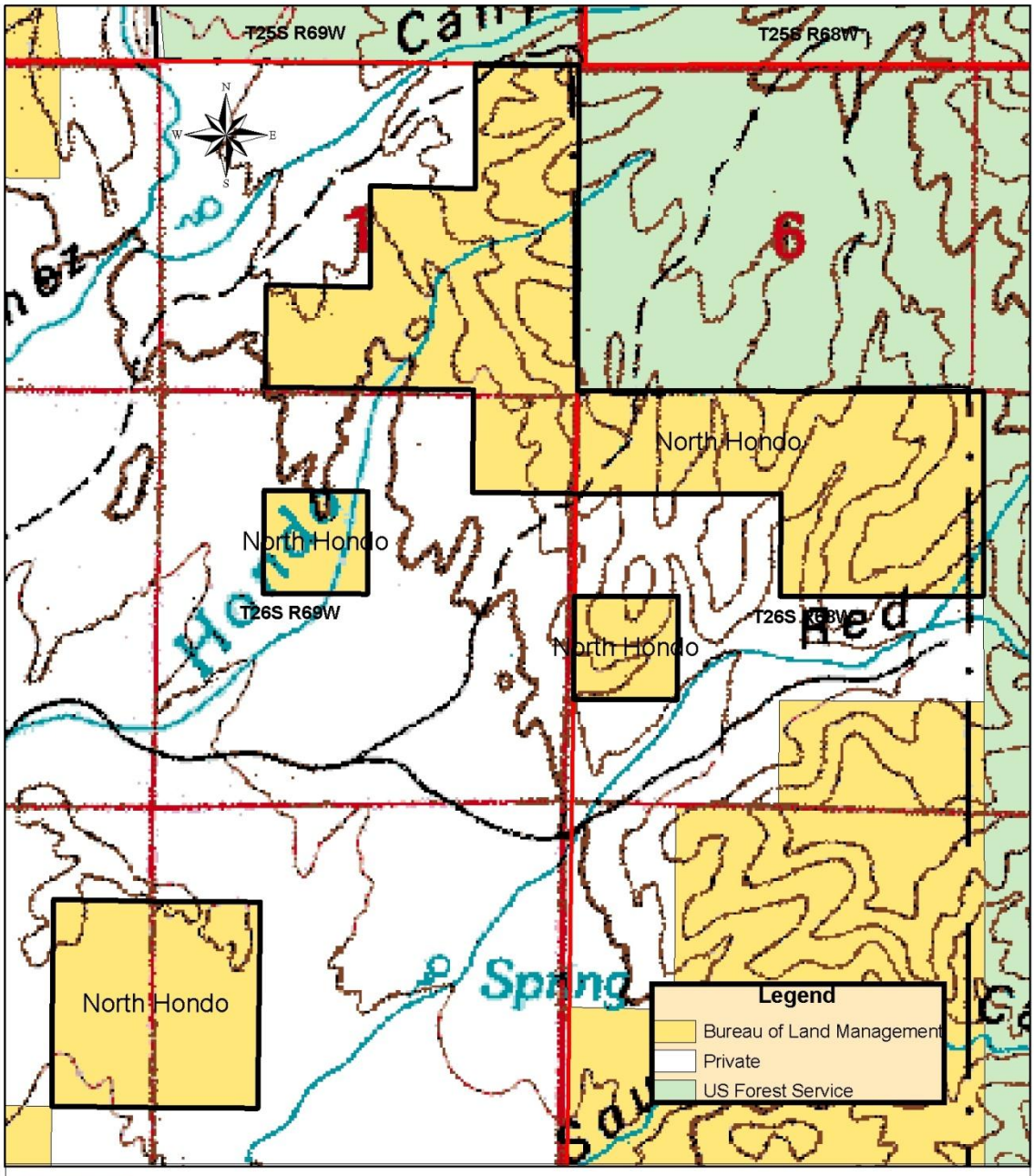
	Authorized Livestock Grazing		
Allotment	Total	Suspended	Active
North Hondo	78	0	78
South Hondo	13	0	13

The following terms and conditions would be included in the grazing permit:

- Grazing use on the allotment will be authorized under Custodial Management. Although, the permit/lease shows a specific number of livestock authorized on public land, the permittee is not restricted to that specific livestock number nor restricted to specific grazing dates as long as the authorized amount of grazing use on public land is not exceeded and the allotment is used in conjunction with the unfenced private land.
- The authorized amount of grazing use on this allotment is the estimated carrying capacity of the allotment and is expected to result in utilization levels of 40% - 60% of the total annual forage production of key forage species. Utilization will be limited to 40% - 60% on grass forage species during the growing season and 80% of previous growth during the dormant season. Utilization on woody riparian species such as cottonwoods, aspen and willows will be limited to 40% of the current year's growth. Grazing use that exceeds these levels is not authorized. Livestock will be moved prior to the maximum utilization levels being exceeded.
- The permittee and all persons associated with the allotment operations shall not damage, destroy, remove, move or disturb any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological or scientific value, such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, vertebrate fossils and artifacts. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the permittee shall protect such resources and immediately notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings.
- This Grazing Permit has been fully processed in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. The grazing schedule complies with Guidelines for Grazing Management in Colorado and is designed to help the public land achieve the Standards for Public Land Health.

In the event that the proposed grazing schedule fails to help public land achieve the Standards for Public Land Health, grazing use on any of these allotments may be revised at any time.



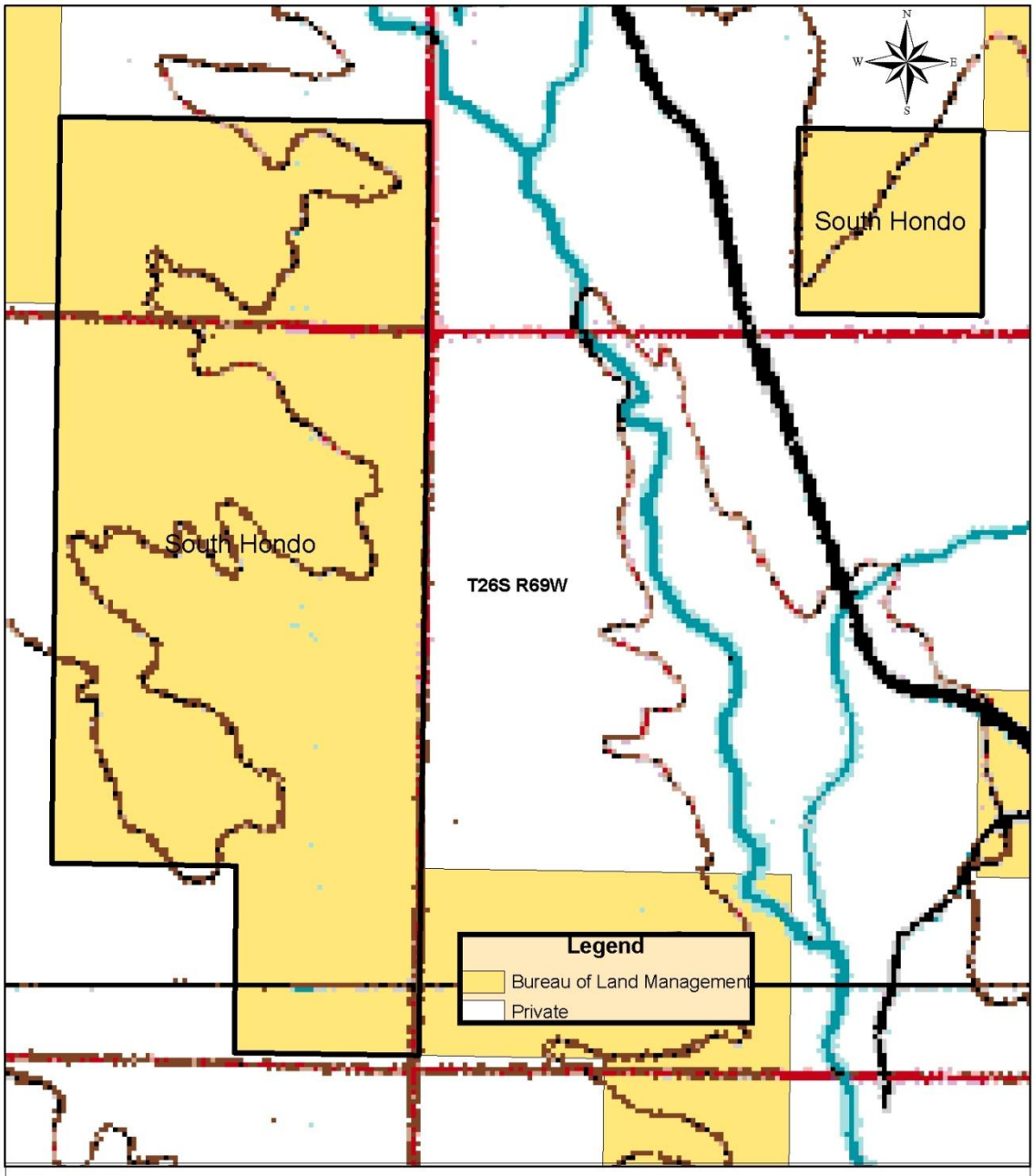


Project map
North Hondo Allottment

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2012-0031 EA

0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles

NOTE TO MAP USERS
No warrantee is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the data layers shown on this map. The official land records of the data providers should be checked or current status on any specific tract of land.



Project map
South Hondo Allottment

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2012-0031 EA

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 Miles

NOTE TO MAP USERS
No warrantee is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of the data layers shown on this map. The official land records of the data providers should be checked or current status on any specific tract of land.

2.2.2 No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments would not be created and the area would be managed according to direction under the RMP and terms and conditions contained in the previous grazing authorization for the Red Canyon allotment.

2.2.3 No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative, grazing use would not be authorized on both the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments. The BLM would initiate a process in accordance with the 4100 regulations to permanently eliminate grazing on the allotments. This alternative does not preclude grazing use on the adjacent private and state lands currently used by the grazing permittee. The boundaries of these lands are currently unfenced from BLM and there is a strong possibility of unauthorized livestock use without new fencing.

2.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT ANALYZED IN DETAIL

None.

CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the actions under the Proposed Action and other alternatives analyzed.

3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Team Review

The following table is provided as a mechanism for resource staff review, to identify those resource values with issues or potential impacts from the proposed action and/or alternatives. Those resources identified in the table as potentially impacted will be brought forward for analysis.

Impact Types: NP = Not Present; NI = Present but Not Impacted; PI = Present and Potentially Impacted*

*All **PI**s are brought forward for analysis in the EA. **NI**s needing longer comment or discussion use Affected Environment in EA – Review Comment should read "see affected Environment

Resource	Impact Type	Date Reviewed	Initials	Review Comment
Air Quality *Ty Webb, Angela Z.*	NP	4/25/12	TW	

Resource	Impact Type	Date Reviewed	Initials	Review Comment
Geology/Minerals *Stephanie Carter, Melissa Smeins*	NI	06/13/12	SSC	The affected environment lies within Huerfano Park an inter-montane basin located between the Sangre de Cristo Range and the Wet Mountains, trending to the northwest. It is physiologically and structurally similar to North, Middle, and South Parks. The geologic setting for the subject areas consists mostly of Cretaceous age sedimentary formations. The federal mineral estate in the subject areas is open to the mining laws for locatable, salable and leasable minerals. As of June 2012, there are no active claims in the area. However, uranium exploration has previously been conducted in this area and there is also a high potential for oil and gas resources to be present, although there is currently no active oil and gas development occurring in the area.
Soils *John Lamman*	PI	04/25/2012	JL	See affected environment
Water Quality Surface and Ground *John Smeins*	NI	4/27/12	JS	The allotments are in dry upland areas and no perennial surface water is present. The headwater areas within North Hondo likely support some intermittent flow, however these areas would likely see very limited livestock usage.
Invasive Plants *John Lamman*	PI	04/25/2012	JL	See affected environment
T&E and Sensitive Species *Matt Rustand*	NP	05/04/2012	MR	Mexican spotted owls are known from eastern Fremont County and western Pueblo County but have not been located in areas addressed in this EA. Peregrine falcons are no longer a T&E species but are considered BLM sensitive species. Peregrine falcons could be expected to use the project area but there are no known eyries in the analysis area. Goshawks are considered a BLM sensitive species but habitat for goshawk in the project area is limited to higher elevation forests. There are no known records of BLM sensitive plant species in the area. The public lands are currently meeting Standard 4 and will continue to meet standards post project implementation.
Vegetation *John Lamman*	PI	04/25/2012	JL	See affected environment
Wetlands and Riparian *Dave Gilbert*	NP*	4/26/12	DG	*Headwaters within North Hondo may periodically sustain flow long enough to support some riparian, conditions, however rugged topography limits livestock from these portions of the allotment.
Wildlife Aquatic *Dave Gilbert*	NP*	4/26/12	DG	*Headwaters within North Hondo may periodically sustain flow to support some minor aquatic habitat however topography limits livestock from these portions of the allotment. Additionally, constructed earthen berms that rarely hold water may support some infrequent aquatic habitat in areas near public land, but they are largely silted in and would serve similar function whether

Resource	Impact Type	Date Reviewed	Initials	Review Comment
				grazed or not as the infrequent flooding limits shoreline vegetation.
Wildlife Terrestrial *Matt Rustand*	PI	05/04/2012	MR	See affected environment.
Migratory Birds *Matt Rustand*	PI	05/04/2012	MR	See affected environment.
Cultural Resources *Erin Watkins*	NI	6/21/2012	EW	Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum Number CO-2002-029, RGFO cultural resources staff conducted a literature review of previous inventories conducted and sites recorded on the public land in the allotment area. After consulting with the range staff to identify concentrations of livestock and potential damage, it was determined that no historic properties might potentially be impacted by the proposed undertaking.
Native American Religious Concerns *Monica Weimer, Erin Watkins*	NP	6/21/2012	EW	Affected Environment: Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum Number CO-2002-029, RGFO cultural resources staff conducted a literature review of previous inventories conducted and sites recorded on the public land in the allotment area. After consulting with the range staff to identify concentrations of livestock and potential damage, it was determined that no historic properties might potentially be impacted by the proposed undertaking. The literature review indicated that no aboriginal sites have been recorded within the allotment boundaries. Therefore, it is unlikely that any traditional cultural properties or other sites of concern to the tribes will be affected by grazing. BLM consulted with 17 tribes regarding the proposed grazing permit renewal. BLM received no comments.
Economics *Martin Weimer*	NP	4/26/12	mw	This action will not result in significant impacts to the socio economics of the region.
Paleontology *Melissa Smeins, Stephanie Carter*	PI	6/13/2012	MJS	See affected environment
Visual Resources *Kalem Lenard*	NI	5/1/2012	KL	The proposed action would not introduce visual contrasts to the landscape and therefore would not impact visual resources.
Environmental Justice *Martin Weimer*	NP	4/26/12	mw	The proposed action affects areas that are rural in nature. The land adjacent to these parcels is open rangeland. As a result, there are no minority or low-income populations in or near the project area. As such, the proposal will not have a disproportionately high or adverse environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.

Resource	Impact Type	Date Reviewed	Initials	Review Comment
Wastes Hazardous or Solid *Stephanie Carter*	NI	06/13/12	SSC	It is assumed that conditions associated with the proposed project site, both surface and subsurface, are currently clean and that there is no known contamination. No hazardous material, as defined by 42 U.S.C. 9601 (which includes materials regulated under CERCLA, RCRA and the Atomic Energy Act, but does not include petroleum or natural gas), will be used, produced, transported or stored during project implementation. If the project involves oil or fuel usage, transfer and/or storage, an adequate spill kit and shovels are required to be accessible.
Recreation *Kalem Lenard*	NI	5/1/2012	KL	The proposed action would not impact the limited amount of recreation that occurs in the area.
Farmlands Prime and Unique *John Lamman*	NP	04/25/2012	JL	There are no prime or unique farmlands involved in the proposed action or the alternatives.
Lands and Realty *Vera Matthews*	NI	5/29/2012	VM	See affected environment
Wilderness, WSAs, ACECs, Wild & Scenic Rivers *Kalem Lenard*	NP	5/1/2012	KL	
Wilderness Characteristics *Kalem Lenard*	NP	5/1/2012	KL	
Range Management *John Lamman*	PI	04/25/2012	JL	See affected environment
Forest Management *Ken Reed*	NI	4/25/2012	KR	
Cadastral Survey *Tony Mule´*	NI	5/15/2012	AM	There are survey corners in the area but they should not be impacted.
Noise *Martin Weimer*	NP	4/26/12	mw	This action will not result in any impacts due to noise or result in any increased noise levels.
Fire *Bob Hurley*	NP	4/25/2012	BH	The proposed action will not create or elevate risk factors leading to unwanted wildland fire ignition.
Law Enforcement *Steve Cunningham*	NP	4/26/12	mw for SC	There are no law enforcement issues associated with this action.

The affected resources brought forward for analysis include:

- **Soils**
- **Water Quality**
- **Invasive Plants**
- **Vegetation**
- **Wildlife Terrestrial**
- **Migratory Birds**
- **Paleontology**
- **Range Management**

3.2 PHYSICAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 SOILS (includes a finding on standard 1)

Affected Environment: The allotments are adjacent to each other and exhibit some of the same soil characteristics. Most of the areas suitable for grazing are a minor component of these allotments associated with low to moderately slopped ephemeral drainages. The dominant soils in these areas (Neville fine sandy loam, Otero fine sandy loam) are well to excessively drained. Moderate to steeply sloped pinyon-juniper woodlands dominate large portions of both allotments. The dominant woodland soil on the North Hondo Allotment is Aridic Ustorthents that is excessively drained. The dominant woodland soil on the South Hondo Allotment is Farisita very gravelly sandy loam that is well drained.

Most of the soils found on the allotments are prone to soil erosion especially where slopes are steep and vegetation cover is sparse. A small area of the South Hondo Allotment in the Farisita very gravelly sandy loam is experiencing notable wind erosion (potentially initiated by historic heavy livestock use). There has been some recent trespass livestock on the South Hondo Allotment which has been confined to the eastern gently sloped portion of the allotment.

Pinyon and juniper woodlands appear to be encroaching into naturally open grassland range sites and pinyon/juniper range site canopies have steadily grown increasingly dense. As this continues over time, many areas are characterized by decreasing amounts of herbaceous plant cover and higher amounts of bare ground, and soil erosion. As a result, productivity, vigor and diversity of a site decrease. These changes in the plant communities appear not to be directly related to livestock grazing.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action
Direct and Indirect Impacts: Having sufficient vegetative cover to protect the soil surface during precipitation events and to slow and allow infiltration of runoff is critical. The Proposed Action

includes utilization levels that will allow sufficient vegetative and litter cover to provide these functions. The proposed action would continue to allow Standards for Rangeland Health to be met through monitoring.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative grazing could be authorized with the same terms and conditions that were part of the last Grazing Authorization that was issued for the Red Canyon Allotment. The last Grazing Authorization did not contain forage utilization standards. Without utilization standards, the BLM would have no recourse to prevent over utilization that could potentially lead to increased soil erosion.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Perform frequent monitoring of allotments.

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Trespass livestock grazing could become an administrative issue.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Fence BLM boundaries or perform frequent monitoring of allotments.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): These allotments are currently meeting Public Land Health Standard for soils (Standard 1). Monitoring of utilization standards identified in the terms and conditions of the proposed action will ensure that the allotments continue to meet Standard 1.

3.3 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

3.3.1 INVASIVE PLANTS*

Affected Environment: This project area is occupied by a habitat type that consists primarily of pinyon/juniper wooded hillsides and blue-grama parks and meadows. Due in part to early historical grazing use and other soil disturbing activities, the allotment may contain populations of non-native downy brome (State of Colorado noxious weed list C category), and native but invasive populations of kochia, beggars tick, cholla cactus, and prickly pear cactus.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The impacts from the type of grazing proposed in this alternative would not likely result in the type of soil disturbance needed to increase the risk of

invasive, non-native weed invasion. Livestock can transport invasive plant seeds clinging to fur and contained in their digestive system.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Invasive plant species identified by grazing permittee and BLM staff, that are listed in the State of Colorado noxious weed list A and B category will be treated under the current RGFO vegetation management plan.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative grazing could be authorized with the same terms and conditions that were part of the last Grazing Authorization that was issued for the Red Canyon Allotment.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Present and future invasive, non-native weed populations that can be controlled by livestock grazing could increase in size and spread to adjacent areas if grazing is eliminated.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

*Invasive plants are plants that are not part of (if exotic), or are a minor component of (if native), the original plant community or communities that have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the site if their future establishment and growth are not actively controlled by management interventions, or are classified as exotic or noxious plants under state or federal law. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants.

3.3.2 VEGETATION (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment: This area supports grassland, shrub-grassland, and forestland vegetation. Grassland that supports blue grama, buffalograss, needleandthread, and wheatgrasses is common at the lower elevations. Pinyon pine, juniper, and true mountain mahogany are common. Ponderosa pine can be found at the higher elevations of the project area.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: There has been no authorized livestock grazing on these allotments for over 25 years. Species composition is similar to other well managed allotments in the area that have been grazed by livestock. Some early seral species could be reduced due to grazing and species like blue grama that are more resistant to grazing could increase. Hoof action will create a more favorable seed bed for some species. Overall, this action would not have a negative impact to vegetation and would continue to allow both allotments to meet public land health standards.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative grazing could be authorized with the same terms and conditions that were part of the last Grazing Authorization that was issued for

the Red Canyon Allotment. The last Grazing Authorization did not contain forage utilization standards. Without utilization standards, the BLM would have no recourse to prevent over utilization that could potentially lead to loss of vegetative cover and negative impacts to species composition.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Due to the lack of authorized grazing since 1985, vegetative cover, litter, and plant species diversity is greater in the project are than on other nearby grazing allotments and private land. Desirable plant species that have increased percent composition in the project area would experience population growth and become better established. Some invasive species could also become established. Trespass livestock grazing is not expected to have a significant impact on vegetation.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): These allotments are currently meeting Public Land Health Standard for Plant Communities (Standard 3). Monitoring of utilization standards identified in the terms and conditions of the proposed action will ensure that the allotments continue to meet Standard 3.

3.3.3 WILDLIFE TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment: Several habitat types are found within the area covered by this EA. At lower elevations the habitat types are primarily pinyon pine and juniper. Open areas of mountain grassland are interspersed throughout the area and mountain shrubs such as currant and mountain mahogany are abundant, especially on south slopes. Pinyon-juniper habitat supports the largest nesting bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West. Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and mountain shrubland habitats are found at higher elevations in the project area. These sites are very dry and warm, with less than 25 inches of precipitation annually. Mature ponderosa pine forests on dry sites are open with mature trees achieving wide separation as they compete for limited soil moisture. Grassy ground cover is maintained by frequent low-intensity fires. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species sometimes found mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir.

Terrestrial species found in the analysis area include bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, black bear and mountain lion. In Colorado, mountain sheep prefer high-visibility habitat dominated by grass, low shrubs, and rock cover, areas near open escape terrain, and topographic relief. Elk tend to inhabit higher elevations during spring and summer and migrate to lower elevations for winter range. During winter, elk form large mixed herds on favored winter range. Mule deer occupy all ecosystems in the analysis area from grasslands to higher mixed conifer habitats.

They reach their greatest densities in shrublands on rough, broken terrain, which provide abundant browse and cover. Mule deer in the area frequently use wet hay meadows on private lands, especially in the spring. Deer densities are slowly increasing after several years of below average populations. In Colorado black bears are most common in montane shrublands and forests, and subalpine forests at moderate elevations, especially in areas with well-developed stands of oakbrush or berry-producing shrubs such as serviceberry and chokecherry. Black bears are locally common in suitable habitats and occur in all habitat types throughout the area. Mountain lions are most common in rough, broken foothills and canyon country, often in association with montane forests, shrublands, and pinyon-juniper woodlands. Mountain lions are common in the analysis area.

A variety of raptor species occur in the planning area including: golden eagle, prairie falcon, peregrine falcon, red-tailed hawk, Coopers hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, and kestrel. Other species that may occur in smaller numbers include: ferruginous hawk, rough-legged hawk, Swainson's hawk, harrier, osprey and goshawk. The Merriam's turkey is a fairly common resident in foothills and mesas of southern Colorado. The Merriam's turkey is common in the analysis area in suitable habitat. Merriam's are found primarily in ponderosa pine forests with an understory of gambel oak. In addition, a wide variety of small mammals and birds are found throughout the allotments that are included in this EA.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: the proposed action is to renew the current leases for 10 years with additional changes to include specific forage utilization standards on allotments under "Custodial" management. The proposed action includes a utilization standard in the new permit that is desirable in order to assure sufficient residual vegetation to protect soil from wind and water erosion and allow adequate seed dissemination and seedling establishment. The proposed action will maintain vegetation in a condition that will continue to support terrestrial wildlife species on the allotment. There will be no impacts from the proposed action.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: This alternative would continue grazing use on the public land that was authorized under the Red Canyon allotment terms and conditions without implementation of utilizations standards or thresholds. The results of several studies debating grazing versus non-grazing impacts to wild ungulates remain contradictory. If grazing is managed correctly, long-term benefits may be an increase in plant species diversity, plant vigor, and reduction of excessive vegetation litter.

Studies have presented evidence that spatial competition between wild ungulate species and cattle may occur. Stewart et al. (2002) found that when cattle were present they would displace both deer and elk, forcing wild ungulates to less preferred feeding grounds. Generally, native ungulates focus on different plant species than cattle; however, when feed is scarce (late winter, early spring) these animals become generalist and compete for a common forage base.

Furthermore, other research notes a positive trend in small mammal populations and diversity when grazing is removed from the landscape (Jones 2000). However, much of the land within and surrounding these allotments is unsuitable for grazing, primarily because of topography. Therefore, the grazing versus no grazing conditions would result in a discountable difference to terrestrial species.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Removal of livestock from the allotment would be expected to elicit the greatest response in small mammal species that typically benefit from increasing vegetative, forage and litter cover (shrews, voles). The allotment has been in a non-use state for some time and therefore it is suspected that small mammal densities are likely at or near potential. The most noticeable improvements would be in mid-seral communities. Although annual, invasive persist in these communities, there is a strong perennial component which will likely become more pervasive over time. Continued non-use is not expected to improve early seral communities. Due primarily to historical grazing practices; these communities have crossed a threshold where improvements to vegetative conditions would be extremely difficult without some type of intervention (fire, chemical).

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: These lands are currently meeting the public land health standard for plant and animal communities. The proposed action should not have an effect on that standing.

3.3.4 MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The BLM has agreed to a memorandum of understanding with Fish and Wildlife Service that strengthens migratory bird conservation by identifying and implementing strategies that promote conservation and avoid or minimize adverse impacts on migratory birds. The MOU is in response to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which prohibits the take of migratory birds. Take can be defined as any means or in any manner to pursue, hunt, capture, or attempt to capture or kill, possess, etc. as described in 16 USC 709-712. The BLM uses the guidance provided in the MOU to assist in NEPA compliance and the mitigation of potential impacts to migratory birds during project implementation.

Several habitat types are found within the area covered by this EA. At lower elevations the habitat types are primarily pinyon pine and juniper. Open areas of mountain grassland are interspersed throughout the area and mountain shrubs such as currant and mountain mahogany are abundant, especially on south slopes. Pinyon-juniper habitat supports the largest nesting bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West. The richness of the pinyon-juniper vegetation type, however, is important due to its middle elevation. Survey tallies in pinyon-juniper are similar in species diversity to the best riparian. Several species are found in the pinyon-juniper habitat and include: black-chinned hummingbird, Lewis's Woodpecker, gray

flycatcher, Cassin's kingbird, gray vireo, pinyon jay, juniper titmouse, black-throated gray warbler, Scott's oriole, ash-throated flycatcher, Bewick's wren, mountain chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, and chipping sparrow.

Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and mountain shrubland habitats are found at higher elevations in the project area. In Fremont County these sites are very dry and warm areas, with less than 25 inches of precipitation annually. Mature ponderosa pine forests on dry sites are open, with mature trees achieving wide separation as they compete for limited soil moisture. Grassy ground cover is maintained by frequent low-intensity fires. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and Gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species sometimes found mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir. Birds typical of these habitat types include Merriam's turkey, Williamson's sapsucker, pygmy nuthatch, western bluebird, band-tailed pigeon, Grace's warbler, flammulated owl, red-breasted nuthatch, violet-green swallow, western tanager, and chipping sparrow. These sites also include small areas of aspen habitat and mountain grassland habitat.

Species that could occur within the project area that are listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern list for the Southern Rockies/Colorado Plateau region include: pinyon jay, ferruginous hawk, Lewis's woodpecker, gray vireo, juniper titmouse, Grace's warbler, golden eagle, and Cassin's finch.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The results of several studies debating grazing versus non-grazing impacts to migratory birds remains mixed. If grazing is managed correctly, long-term benefits may be an increase in plant species diversity, plant vigor, and reduction of excessive vegetation litter. Bock et al. (1993) suggest very little is known in regards to impacts to migratory birds from grazing in western forests. Historically, these areas were exposed to heavy grazing which correlates with the transformation of these woodlands into denser forests with a decreased understory of herbaceous plants. This transformation diminished the frequency of low intensity fire. Furthermore, historical grazing regimes correlate with the expansion of pinyon-juniper woodland. Again, historical grazing reduced cover of grasses, facilitating establishment of pinyon- juniper seedlings and simultaneously reducing ground fires that otherwise might eliminate woody vegetation. The change in herbaceous structure caused a change in migratory bird species diversity by negatively affecting species dependent on herbaceous and shrubby cover or species that require open savannahs as opposed to closed-canopy forests. However, positive impacts to species requiring closed canopy systems likely occurred.

Currently, BLM's standards for public land health do not allow for excessive grazing that would alter forest structure in the manner historical grazing regimes may have. The allotment has been in a non-use state (effectively identical to the no grazing alternative) and likely would have remained in a non-use state for an indefinite amount of time. The proposed action will likely have some potential for trampling/disruption of nests, particularly in ground or low shrub nesting species; however it is expected to be minimal. Reductions in the amount of herbaceous understory available for forage and cover resources prior to the nesting season are anticipated

under the proposed grazing system. It is suspected that nest densities may be suppressed to some degree in those areas that are expected to experience concentrated livestock use. The proposed grazing system is not expected to have any measurable influence on breeding bird abundance or reproductive/recruitment success in the permit acres of woodland types. Low forage availability and more rugged terrain generally limit livestock use of these habitats.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: This alternative would continue grazing use on the public land that was authorized under the Red Canyon allotment terms and conditions without implementation of utilizations standards or thresholds. Impacts of grazing on upland sandpipers indicated a reduction in nest density in grazed pastures; however, nesting success between grazed and non-grazed pastures remained unchanged (Bowen and Kruse 1993). Bock et al. (1993) conducted a literature review on avian responses to grazing in a multitude of habitats and found that bird species generally showed a negative response. Reasons for a negative response include, but are not limited to a reduction in nesting cover and disturbance or destruction of nests by cattle. Examples of some species indicating a negative response include chipping sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, and mountain bluebird. However, some bird species benefit from grazing such as the BLM sensitive mountain plover, Lewis's woodpecker, and Golden Eagle. Overall, migratory birds would likely show a net benefit from the no grazing alternative.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Removal of livestock from the allotment would be expected to elicit the greatest response in small mammal species that typically benefit from increasing vegetative, forage and litter cover (shrews, voles). The allotment has been in a non-use state for some time and therefore it is suspected that small mammal densities are likely at or near potential. The most noticeable improvements would be in mid-seral communities. Although annual, invasive persist in these communities, there is a strong perennial component which will likely become more pervasive over time. Continued non-use is not expected to improve early seral communities. Due primarily to historical grazing practices; these communities have crossed a threshold where improvements to vegetative conditions would be extremely difficult without some type of intervention (fire, chemical).

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.4 HERITAGE RESOURCES AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

3.4.1 PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The affected environment lies within Huerfano Park an inter-montane basin located between the Sangre de Cristo Range and the Wet Mountains, trending to the

northwest. It is physiologically and structurally similar to North, Middle, and South Parks. Cretaceous and Tertiary age sedimentary formations including the Tertiary Huerfano formation and the Cretaceous Niobrara, Dakota, and Greenhorn formations are found in the proposed project area.

The Huerfano Formation is a Class 5 geologic formation, according to the BLM's Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) System that was created to assist in determining proper mitigation approaches for surface disturbing activities. Class 5 indicates highly fossiliferous units that consistently and predictably produce federally protected vertebrate fossils that are at risk of human-caused adverse impacts or natural degradation. The Cretaceous Niobrara, Dakota, and Greenhorn formations are Class 3 geologic formations that have moderate potential for producing vertebrate fossils.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Potential impacts to fossil localities would be both direct and indirect. Direct impacts to or destruction of fossils would occur from unmitigated activities conducted on formations with high potential for important scientific fossil resources. Indirect impacts would involve damage or loss of fossil resources due to the unauthorized collection of scientifically important fossils by workers or the public due to increased access to fossil localities in the Project Area. Adverse impacts to important fossil resources would be long-term and significant since fossils removed or destroyed would be lost to science. Adverse significant impacts to paleontological resources can be reduced to a negligible level through mitigation of ground disturbing activities. It is possible that the proposed project would have the beneficial impact that ground disturbance activities might result in the discovery of important fossil resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: In order to prevent potential impacts to paleontologic resources, a stipulation will be attached to the grazing permit that directs the holder to notify the BLM RGFO immediately if any vertebrate fossils or their traces are discovered during operations within this allotment. Operations may continue as long as the fossil specimen would not be damaged or destroyed by the activity. The BLM RGFO shall evaluate or have evaluated such discoveries and shall notify the permittee what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries.

No Action Alternative**:** Under this alternative, BLM would not allow the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments and the area would be managed according to direction under the RMP and terms and conditions contained in the previous grazing authorization for the Red Canyon allotment.

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Continuing to allow grazing and grazing related improvements to the allotment with no terms and conditions for protection of paleo resources could result in significant adverse impacts to paleontologic resources. Potential impacts to fossil localities would be both direct and indirect. Direct impacts to or destruction of fossils would occur from unmitigated activities conducted on formations with high potential for important scientific fossil resources. Indirect impacts would involve damage or loss of fossil resources due to the unauthorized collection of scientifically important fossils by workers or the

public due to increased access to fossil localities in the Project Area. Adverse impacts to important fossil resources would be long-term and significant since fossils removed or destroyed would be lost to science. Adverse significant impacts to paleontological resources can be reduced to a negligible level through mitigation of ground disturbing activities.

Protective/Mitigation Measures:
In order to prevent potential impacts to paleontologic resources, a stipulation will be attached to the grazing permit that directs the holder to notify the BLM RGFO immediately if any vertebrate fossils or their traces are discovered during operations within this allotment. Operations may continue as long as the fossil specimen would not be damaged or destroyed by the activity. The BLM RGFO shall evaluate or have evaluated such discoveries and shall notify the permittee what action shall be taken with respect to such discoveries.

No Grazing Alternative:
Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative, grazing use would not be authorized on both the North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments. If there were no grazing on this allotment, the potential for direct and indirect impacts to paleontologic resources would be reduced due to reduced exposure of paleontologic resources through soil disturbing activity that could potentially remove soil cover and vegetation that provides a protective barrier to paleontologic resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

3.5 LAND RESOURCES

3.5.1 RANGE MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The grazing schedule and estimated carrying capacity of the public land in the allotment is described under the Proposed Action portion of this analysis. The proposed action includes a utilization standard that is desirable in order to assure sufficient residual vegetation to protect soil from wind and water erosion and allow adequate seed dissemination and seedling establishment. Even when annual forage production may vary on a year to year basis, the utilization standards provide a visual and practical way of limiting grazing use to a desirable level.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The proposed action includes two changes in the grazing authorizations for each of the allotments. Forage production on public land is based on recent, updated surveys. The proposed action includes specific utilization standards for forage species for the allotment that would ensure for adequate vegetative cover, recovery from gazing and

adaptation to climatic conditions. Additional stipulations addressing cultural and paleontological resources will be added to the permit.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative grazing could be authorized with the same terms and conditions that were part of the last Grazing Authorization that was issued for the Red Canyon Allotment. Since allowable forage utilization levels were not a part of the the last authorization issued, any grazing authorization issued with the old terms and conditions would be in conflict with the current Resource Management Plan for the RGFO. The base property for the Red Canyon Allotment is now owned by two separate entities. An administrative action identifying a single entity that the BLM would authorize to graze on the Red Canyon Allotment would be problematic.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative, no grazing would be authorized on the allotments. This alternative would necessitate varying amounts of new fence construction or some other strategy for preventing grazing use on the public land. The cost to adjacent private land owners for a cadastral survey and additional fencing necessary to prevent livestock grazing on public land would be cost prohibitive. The prospect of this additional cost can increase the likelihood that private landowners will decide to abandon livestock production in favor of sub-dividing and selling their land. Exurban development of lands that have been historically a part of family ranches has dramatically increased fencing and has frequently had negative impacts to plant species composition, soil stability, compaction, and big game movement.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

3.5.2 LANDS AND REALTY

Affected Environment:

The South Hondo and North Hondo allotments are areas that experience trespass, possibly brought on by the irregular land patterns resulting in mistakes in private, county and federal records. Several trespass issues are known in the area, and will be addressed as Lands and Realty staffing and budget will allow.

There are rights of way in the area which may be affected by this authorization they include:

COC-13147 is a Fed 44 LD 513 road for Forest Service access originally written as a range improvement and funded by the permittee in 1971. It is also referred to as the Indian Ruins Road 54080A0 project file 0864. The Forest Service does not indicate this road on any of their current maps, and considering that the road leads to the Greenhorn Wilderness, it is doubtful that the road is intended to be open. The road however may be a historic road, so no efforts will be made other than natural re-vegetation and deterioration for reclaiming the road.

According to recent visits to the area, the road is no longer in existence due to deterioration already at this time. BLM range conservationist John Lamman indicates the road is not in existence and he has no reason to want the authorization to stay in existence, therefore the Forest Service will be approached to relinquish this right of way and close the file.

COC-46386 is a FLPMA road right of way to a private individual.

COC-54242 is a FLPMA telephone line authorized to Qwest Corporation.

3.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY

Range Management: Beginning in the 1850s, most of the arable land in and around the project area was being actively cultivated. Other land that was accessible to livestock was subjected to high stocking rates and season long grazing that had negative impacts on vegetative species composition and soil stability. Overall stocking rates are now lower due to the unsustainability of the early rates and many ranchers use modern grazing management techniques to promote healthy and resilient rangelands. Exurban development of lands that have been historically a part of family ranches near the project area has dramatically increased fencing and has frequently had negative impacts to plant species composition, soil stability and big game movement. Livestock grazing has not been authorized in the project area for over 25 years. The terms and conditions for any grazing permit that would be issued for the project area would limit utilization to 40% - 60% on grass forage species during the growing season and 80% of previous growth during the dormant season. Utilization on woody riparian species such as cottonwoods, aspen and willows will be limited to 40% of the current year's growth. Grazing use that exceeds these levels would not be authorized. Livestock utilization of public land in the project area will be less than private land in the area. Cumulative impacts are expected to be minor.

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species, Terrestrial Wildlife and Migratory Birds: Throughout the project area there are many activities currently occurring, along with historic impacts, which affect wildlife resources. Historically, the allotment had been previously grazed; however, after many years of rest it visually appears to be in a desirable condition. A two-track road system is currently in place from previous grazing regimes resulting in minimal impact from additional roads. Minimal subdividing and expansion of the surrounding private lands is projected; therefore, impacts from habitat fragmentation is not expected.

Water Quality: Cumulatively, within the sixth order watershed where the respective allotments lie, there are a lot of activities that could add up to negatively impact water quality. These activities include major highways, housing, recreation and grazing. At this time, the water quality in most of the area is good, with the additional activities and grazing, water quality would remain the same as it has been in the past; therefore the Proposed Action, and all alternatives, would not add to the current situation in the future.

CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Please see Interdisciplinary Team Review list for BLM Participants

4.2 TRIBES, INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS, OR AGENCIES CONSULTED

Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, Cheyenne River Lakota Tribe, Comanche Tribe of Oklahoma, Crow Creek Sioux, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Northern Arapaho Tribe, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Eastern Shoshone Tribe, Southern Ute Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Ute Tribe, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.

CHAPTER 5 - REFERENCES

Bureau of Land Management. 1996. Royal Gorge Resource Area Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision. Front Range District. Canon City, Colorado.

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Bock, C. E., V. A. Saab, T. D. Rich, and D. S. Dobkin. 1993. Effects of livestock grazing on neotropical migratory landbirds in western North America. In: Finch, D. M., P. W. Stangel (eds.). Status and management of neotropical migratory birds: September 21-25, 1992, Estes Park, Colorado. Gen. Tech. Rep. RM-229. Fort Collins, Colo.: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service: 296-309.

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Stewart, K. M., R. T. Bowyer, J. G. Kie, N. J. Cimon, and B. K. Johnson. 2002. Temporospatial distributions of elk, mule deer, and cattle: resource partitioning and competitive displacement. Journal of Mammalogy 83: 229-244.

Finding Of No Significant Impact
(FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2012-0031 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

RATIONALE:

Context: The Proposed Action renews domestic livestock grazing on the North and South Hondo Allotments after 25 years of non-use. This action was prompted by the receipt of an application to graze by a new land owner.

Both allotments are located in Huerfano County, Colorado northeast of the town of Gardner. The allotments are located at an elevation between 6,960 and 8,160 feet. For the most part both allotments consist of small open grassland parks intermixed with dense stands of pinyon-juniper woodlands. Both allotments were previously made up the Red Canyon Allotment (#05732) The Red Canyon Allotment has not been grazed since 1985. The allotments will be managed together along with the adjacent unfenced private lands. These allotments are essential to the permittees' livestock operation and economic wellbeing.

Intensity: I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the New Grazing Authorizations for North Hondo and South Hondo Allotments Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse: Through the land health assessments and environmental analysis, adverse impacts to the allotments and the environment can be managed and mitigated. The allotments proposed for reintroduction of grazing are all meeting BLM Land Health Standards. Some plant species will respond favorably to livestock grazing while others will be impacted negatively. This proposal acknowledges that and incorporates a utilization level into allotment stipulations to prevent overutilization of forage on these allotments. This more intensive management by the BLM encourages similar management of the adjacent private property. The utilization of the allotment will provide a positive economic benefit to the permittee.

Public health and safety: The proposed action reflects analyses and management practices that do the most to protect important water supplies by preventing erosion and sediment

production. Due to the dry, upland nature of most of these allotments being analyzed, sediment production from a water quality standpoint is the biggest concern from grazing. The proposed action would leave sufficient ground cover present to protect the soils from eroding and downstream waters would not be affected from grazing on public lands.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area: The EA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as: wild and scenic rivers, prime or unique farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or designated wilderness areas or wilderness study areas; were present.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial: Analysis for the issuing of grazing permits is a common action conducted under NEPA. Conditions and impacts will vary and be unique to each allotment. There is no disagreement or controversy among ID team members or reviewers over the nature of the effects of the action on resource values.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: BLM has a long history of managing public lands for multiple-use. Grazing is one part of that multiple-use mandates. Given the BLM's institutional knowledge on this subject, all risks were considered in the EA and were found to be neither unique nor unknown.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts: The proposed action does establish a standard of precedent for the permit issuance process, in that there is comprehensive review of all resource values and land health standards are either met or exceeded.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts: With the exception of some trespass and existing rights-of-way, there are no other known federal actions that have occurred on the allotment. Grazing has the potential to cause impacts that could be positive or negative on the land depending on how the allotments are managed. The proposed action with proper forage utilization is expected to contribute positively to land health of the allotments.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum Number CO-2002-029, RGFO cultural resources staff conducted a literature review of previous inventories conducted and sites recorded on the public land in the allotment area. During a field visit, the areas of new range improvements were evaluated and no historic properties were present. Based on the information collected during the literature review, it was determined that no historic properties would be impacted by the proposed undertaking.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat: Not present.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant

with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

NAME OF PREPARER: John Lamman

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: Melissa K. S. Garcia

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 11/28/12

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Keith E. Berger
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 11/29/31

APPENDICES:

ATTACHMENTS: